United Nations

Press Release

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

◆ Secretary-General tells Palestinian Rights Committee preoccupation with Persian Gulf crisis should not turn world attention away from Palestine question; will name special representative for Middle East.

◆ Iraqi Foreign Minister says he finds it "strange" that Secretary-General has not expressed his view with regard to letter of 28 January, stating that "forces of the United States, NATO and Zionist alliance have been committing heinous and premeditated crimes against Iraq".

◆ World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund to send joint mission to Iraq to deliver shipment of emergency medical supplies for children and mothers.

◆ Speakers at Human Rights Commission session in Geneva praises South African President's announced intention to repeal Land Act, Group Areas Act and Development of Black Communities Act.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar told the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People this morning that, although the world was preoccupied with the Persian Gulf crisis, it should not turn its attention from the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which touched, directly or indirectly, millions of persons and dozens of countries.

The Secretary-General disclosed that he had decided to name a special representative for the Middle East during the coming weeks in order to assist an active negotiating process to promote peace in that region of the world. Before making his choice, he would consult with the interested parties as well as with the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Perez de Cuellar stated that the protection of the Palestinian civilians under the occupation remained a grave preoccupation of the international community, and he would do everything in his power with the

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means available to carry out the tasks given to him. He continued to believe, however, that the application of those measures would not suffice to put an end to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians which had an essentially political character and called for a negotiated solution.

It was encouraging to note, he said, that in a statement made through their President on 20 December, the members of the Security Council had reaffirmed their support for a negotiating process in which all concerned parties would participate, and which would lead to a just and durable solution to the conflict. The Council members agreed that an international conference, at an appropriate time, properly structured, should facilitate a settlement, but there was no unanimity as to when would be the appropriate time.

Beginning its work for the year this morning, the Committee re-elected Absa Claude Diallo (Senegal) as its Chairman for 1991. The Committee decided to re-establish its working group to formalize ideas on what it should be doing in light of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

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Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, in a letter to Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar dated 2 February, said he found it strange that Mr. Perez de Cuellar had not expressed his view with regard to his letter of 28 January. In that letter, the Iraqi Minister stated, among other things, that "the forces of the United States, NATO and Zionist alliance have been committing heinous and premeditated crimes against Iraqi citizens and against the economic, cultural, scientific and religious institutions of the Iraqi people".

Mr. Aziz further held the Secretary-General himself and the countries behind the Security Council resolutions on the Gulf conflict personally responsible for such "crimes committed against Iraq".

In the new letter made available today, Mr. Aziz said the Secretary-General, instead of expressing his view, had remained silent concerning the crimes which, he said, for the first time in history were being committed in the name of the United Nations. The crimes, he continued, were being committed under the "cloak of groundless and unjust Security Council resolutions", the most recent of which was resolution 678 -- the resolution setting the 15 January deadline for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

The Iraqi Minister said in the letter that the very goals the United Nations was supposed to embody were being violated before the eyes and with the knowledge of the Secretary-General, who had uttered "not a word".

Attached to the letter today is a new list of areas of Iraq which were said to have come under attack, indicating the extent of damage and casualties. That brought to 288 the total number of killed, according to the Iraqi authorities, and the total number of wounded to some 630.

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The Secretary-General, in response to the Iraqi Minister's first letter, had earlier rejected the charge that he and countries behind the Security Council resolutions were to blame for the current conflict in the Gulf. Mr. Perez de Cuellar reminded Mr. Aziz that he had appealed repeatedly on 15 January and again a week later to President Saddam Hussein to respond in order to find a peaceful solution to the "grave and tragic conflict" and to save human lives.

In another development, the Security Council held informal consultations this afternoon to discuss the question of the Persian Gulf conflict.

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A United Nations official announced today that a joint UNICEF/World Health Organization (WHO) mission is to be sent to Iraq to deliver a shipment of emergency medical supplies to assist in the care of children and mothers and ascertain essential health needs. The dispatch of such medical supplies, the official said, would be within the spirit of the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration of the World Summit for Children. He said it was hoped the mission could arrive in Baghdad by the end of next week.

Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar and UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant met two days ago to discuss how the Organization could help meet urgent humanitarian needs arising from the conflict in the region of the Persian Gulf. Mr. Grant briefed the Secretary-General on his recent visit to Geneva where he met with the heads of various international humanitarian relief organizations including the WHO Director-General. Currently, the United Nations official said, there are relief operations in four countries of the region and major contingency preparations have been made as part of the Regional Humanitarian Plan of Action, led by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO).

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The Human Rights Commission, currently debating the human rights situation in southern Africa, today heard a number of speakers praise South African President de Klerk's announced intention to repeal the Land Act, the Group Areas Act and the Development of Black Communities Act which divide the country by law geographically to separate whites and blacks. At the same time, today's speakers also called for further measures not to reform apartheid but to eliminate it.

Among the speakers, Ambassador Emeka Azikiwe of Nigeria said his delegation welcomed President de Klerk's announcement. Nigeria felt, however, that South Africa had not yet been put on the path of irreversible change. He called for a democratically elected assembly to regulate the transition to a free, united and democratic South Africa.

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Also addressing the Commission, the Ambassador of Canada, Raynell Andreychek, said the impact of measures to replace well-known pillars of apartheid with a non-racial land policy should not be underestimated. She was surprised, however, that President de Klerk had overlooked in his statement the urgent need for action on political prisoners, exiles and security legislation. Fewer than a quarter of all political prisoners had been released nearly a full year after Nelson Mandela was freed, she said.

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